



CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS
Michelle Lujan Grisham | Chairwoman
115TH CONGRESS

April 11, 2018

The Honorable Mike Conaway
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Conaway:

The Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) is dedicated to advancing policies that help the 58 million Hispanics living and contributing across the country. This includes championing policies that promote a strong agriculture sector and help Hispanic communities achieve economic security and increase access to healthy, affordable food.

It is critical that the House Agriculture Committee craft an equitable farm bill that does not disproportionately target or cut funding for important programs that help low-income and Hispanic families. Therefore, as the House Agriculture committee continues its work to reauthorize the Farm Bill, we write to ask that you protect and preserve the following programs important to our communities:

Nutritious Food for a Diverse Nation

- **Protect the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**
Despite our nation's wealth, 16.5 percent of our population – including 6.5 million children – live in a food insecure household.¹ For Latinos, that number jumps to 18.5 percent. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is our country's single most important nutrition program serving more than 42 million² individuals, including 10 million low-income Hispanic children and families.³ In 2015, the SNAP program helped lift about 2.5 million Latinos, including 1.2 million children, out of poverty and kept 1.2 million Latinos out of deep poverty⁴. **We urge the Committee to oppose any cuts to SNAP in order to prevent increased rates of food insecurity and poverty in America.**

¹ *Key Statistics and Graphics- Food Security Status of U.S Households in 2016*, U.S. DEP'T. OF AGRIC. ECON. RES. SERV., <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics.aspx> (last updated Oct. 4, 2017).

² U.S. DEP'T. OF AGRIC., SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM PARTICIPATION AND COSTS, (2018), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/pd/SNAPsummary.pdf>

³ SNAP Helps Millions of Latinos, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
[HTTPS://WWW.CBPP.ORG/RESEARCH/FOOD-ASSISTANCE/SNAP-HELPS-MILLIONS-OF-LATINOS#_EDN4](https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-helps-millions-of-latinos#_EDN4)

⁴ SNAP Helps Millions of Latinos, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
[HTTPS://WWW.CBPP.ORG/RESEARCH/FOOD-ASSISTANCE/SNAP-HELPS-MILLIONS-OF-LATINOS#_EDN4](https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-helps-millions-of-latinos#_EDN4)

- **Healthy Eating**

Too often low-income Americans do not have access to healthy foods or know how to prepare nutritious meals. In particular, Latinos are disproportionately impacted by preventable diseases like obesity and diabetes, which could be significantly reduced, in part, if individuals maintained a proper, healthy diet.⁵ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), almost a quarter of Latino children aged 2-19 were obese (21.9 percent), compared to their non-Hispanic White and Black counterparts (14.7 percent and 19.5 percent, respectively)⁶. The CDC estimates that the annual medical cost of obesity in the U.S. was \$147 billion in 2008 U.S. dollars. These costs will continue to increase if access to educational prevention programs is reduced. **We urge the Committee to support and build on healthy eating programs like Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) program and SNAP-Ed.** These programs help educate our communities, including SNAP recipients, on preparing healthy foods, planning nutritious meals, and stretching their food dollars effectively. Additionally, **we urge the Committee to include the *Results Through Innovation Act* (HR 3577),** which builds upon the highly successful SNAP Education and Training pilot programs.

- **Preserve Nutrition Programs (CSFP and TEFAP)**

The Farm Bill includes targeted nutrition programs like the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). CSFP provides U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) commodities primarily to seniors, mothers and children. **We urge the Committee to maintain the current funding authorization levels for CSFP.** TEFAP provides emergency food and nutrition assistance through local food banks, soup kitchens and pantries for low-income individuals. This program assists many Americans, including the 21.9 percent of Hispanics in the United States—5.5 million of who are children—that live in poverty.⁷ **We urge the Committee to include the bipartisan Food Bank Assistance Act (H.R. 4020),** which would help food banks across the nation provide more food to more families by increasing the funding levels for TEFAP.

- **Improved Nutrition Assistance for the Mariana Islands**

The Northern Mariana Islands do not participate in SNAP; instead it receives a nutrition assistance block grant that falls short of providing SNAP-equivalent food assistance benefits to the Islands' population. The 2014 Farm Bill sought to establish a SNAP pilot

⁵ *Obesity and Hispanic Americans*, U.S. DEP'T. OF HEALTH AND HUM. SERV. OFF. OF MINORITY HEALTH, <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=70> (last modified Sept. 15, 2017).; *Diabetes and Hispanic Americans*, U.S. DEP'T. OF HEALTH AND HUM. SERV. OFF. OF MINORITY HEALTH <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=63> (last modified May 11, 2016)

⁶ *Prevalence of Obesity Among Adults and Youth: United States, 2011–2014*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db219.htm>

⁷ Antonio Flores, Gustavo Lopez & Jynnah Radford, *Facts on U.S Latinos, 2015*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (2015). <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2017/09/18/facts-on-u-s-latinos-trend-data/>

program but a two-year study found that although SNAP could serve 2.8 times as many participants in the Northern Marianas, implementing SNAP would be time-consuming and costly.⁸ Pilot program funds under the 2014 bill are being used for an Enhanced Nutrition Assistance Program that has increased and expanded benefits. **We urge the Committee to include the *Northern Marianas Enhanced Nutrition Assistance Act* (H.R. 4216), which would continue the enhanced funding for another five years while the Commonwealth develops the systems necessary to implement the full SNAP program.**

- **Production and distribution of nutritious foods**

Expanding access to fresh and nutritious foods requires support for producers and distributors. **We urge the Committee to support and improve the availability for specialty crops, including fresh fruits and vegetables, by fully funding the Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops and Specialty Crop Block Grant programs.**

Advancing Agriculture in the 21st Century and Promoting Economic Opportunity

- **Rural Development**

Rural economic development is a critical component of the Farm Bill. These programs help build sustainable communities in agricultural areas and provide new jobs. **We urge the Committee to fully fund and support rural development programs, such as the Rural Business Development Grant, Value-Added Producer Grant Program, and Rural Cooperative Development Grants.**

- **Agricultural Research**

For generations, we have understood the power of research and training in making American farmers more efficient, productive and competitive. Today, the Land Grant Universities continue to play a critical role in educating our children and developing better agricultural methods. Many of these universities are Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) and provide a ladder of opportunity for immigrants and first-generation Americans.⁹ **We urge the Committee to continue our national investment in research programs, like the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) at \$80 million and the Organic Research and Extension Initiative at \$50 million.**

- **Broadband Service**

The internet has transformed how we work and interact. Increasingly, those without high-speed internet access are left behind. Supporting the development of broadband

⁸ U.S. DEP'T. OF AGRIC., FOOD AND NUTRITION SERV., ASSESSING THE FEASIBILITY OF IMPLEMENTING THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS, (August 2016). <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/assessing-feasibility-implementing-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-commonwealth-northern>

⁹ John Michael Lee Jr. & Samaad Wes Keys, *APLU: Committed to Latino Student Access*, ASSOC. OF PUB. & LAND-GRANT UNIVS., THE OFFICE FOR ACCESS & SUCCESS ISSUE BRIEF, (August 2013). <http://www.aplu.org/library/aplu-committed-to-latino-student-success-and-supporting-hispanic-serving-institutions/file>

services in rural areas will both better connect communities and provide increased economic opportunities. **We urge the Committee to authorize funding for the Farm Bill Broadband Loan Program and Distance Learning & Telemedicine Grants.** Furthermore, we **urge the Committee to include the Rural Broadband Expansion Act (H.R.4308)**, which would authorize new grant funding to expand broadband in rural areas where it is not yet economically viable for providers to deliver services.

- **A Diverse Agricultural Sector**

Just as the rest of the United States, farmers and ranchers are growing more diverse. To ensure that these agriculture workers have access to USDA programs, we **urge the Committee to authorize mandatory funding of \$10 million per year for the Socially Disadvantaged Farmer and Rancher Outreach Program.** We also **urge the committee to maintain the set asides for socially disadvantaged and veteran farmers and ranchers** in other programs, like the Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program, and Direct and Guaranteed loans and down payment assistance.

- **Next Generation of Farmers and Ranchers**

To sustain our agricultural system, we must train, educate, and mentor the next generation of farmers and ranchers. Hispanic Farmers and Ranchers are the fastest growing segment of new operators. According to the Census of Agriculture, “Hispanic farmers and ranchers tend to be slightly younger on average than their counterparts nationwide [and] are significantly more likely to own all of the land that they operate, rather than renting or leasing land.”¹⁰ To support these new farmers and the work they do, we **urge the Committee to authorize mandatory founding of \$20 million for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program.**

- **Safe and Healthy Workplace**

Every year, one in six Americans becomes sick because of a foodborne illness.¹¹ Proper workplace standards and protections are essential for keeping agricultural workers – and the American public – safe and healthy. **We urge the Committee to expand food safety initiatives and trainings to farm workers, as in the Farm to Table Safety Act (H.R. 4400).** Further, we **urge the Committee to codify workplace protections, like those in the CARE Act (H.R.2886)**, which would limit children farmworkers’ exposure to dangerous chemicals.

¹⁰ U.S. DEP’T. OF AGRIC., *Hispanic Farmers*, 2007 CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE (2007).
https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online_Highlights/Fact_Sheets/Demographics/hispanic.pdf

¹¹ U.S. *Burden of Foodborne Illness: Findings*, CTR. FOR DISEASE CONT. & PREVENTION,
<https://www.cdc.gov/foodborneburden/2011-foodborne-estimates.html> (last updated Jul. 15, 2016).

Healthy and Sustainable Lands

- **Clean and Reliable Water**

Every community deserves access to clean and reliable water. Rural and agricultural communities especially rely on clean water for their farming and ranching operations. **We urge the Committee to prioritize protecting water sources through conservation programs.**

- **Conservation and Environmental Quality**

A healthy environment is required to ensure a thriving agricultural sector. For decades through the Farm Bill, Congress has supported conservation programs that improve soil quality, protect water and wildlife, and help improve air quality. USDA provides voluntary support, public-private partnership opportunities, financial incentives, and technical assistance to farmers and landowners interested in conservation. **We urge the Committee to support the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, Conservation Innovation Grants, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.**

- **Disaster Assistance**

In the past year, we have seen major natural disasters, from floods to fires, devastate communities across the country. Agricultural communities are not only impacted by these natural catastrophes but are also vulnerable to other disasters, including pest infestations and disease. We must prepare for these events, mitigate the damage, and help communities recover. Federal crop insurance programs help support farmers, ranchers and other agricultural producers in case of a disaster. **We urge the Committee to maintain funding for crop insurance, the Plant Pest and Disease Management and Disaster Prevention Program, and the Emergency Watershed Protection Program.** These programs are essential to ensure that the agricultural sector continues to produce the food needed to feed the country.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or we could provide you additional information, please do not hesitate to contact CHC Executive Director Alma Acosta at alma.acosta@mail.house.gov or at 202-225-2410.

Sincerely,



Michelle Lujan Grisham
CHC Chair



Jim Costa
CHC Agriculture Task Force Chair